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ABSTRACT

Georgia State University has developed undergraduate applied language programs in commercial French, German, and Spanish combining practical with theoretical studies. The curricula stress the communicative aspect of language, and are based on the content of certification examinations given in France, Germany, and Spain. Two upper-level courses in commercial language are offered in each language, and students are encouraged to take an additional course on the current political, economic, and cultural issues of the target language's country. The language course content includes business vocabulary, the legal structure of business, the banking system, employer-employee relations, general business practice, cultural and social issues, and business correspondence, using the contrastive approach. Authentic materials are used, and special skills such as listening to radio broadcasts and interviewing are stressed. The program includes an internship abroad in cooperation with major corporations. While the program is designed for language students wishing to enter business, it is also useful for business students. Most recently, an advisory board of community leaders in international business has been added to the program. (MSE)

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LANGUAGES FOR BUSINESS MEANS BUSINESS FOR LANGUAGES

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LANGUAGES FOR BUSINESS MEANS BUSINESS FOR LANGUAGES

In the presence of a trade deficit of looming proportions, it would seems unnecessary to demonstrate the need of American businesses to sell abroad. Answering the need for education with an international perspective, courses and programs have been designed which provide students with an opportunity to learn about foreign cultures, languages and business practices. Such courses or programs are often interdisciplinary in nature and are especially promising when they combine the study of foreign languages with other studies such as business studies.

Georgia State University in Atlanta has traditionally been devoted to serving the needs of its urban community by stressing the practical side of studies along with the purely theoretical.

One example of this is the Applied Language Programs in the Department of Foreign Languages. In a shift away from the conventional view that foreign languages prepare you predominantly for that country's literature and the classroom consequently being dominated by reading exercises, we stress the communicative approach of the foreign language. This is also reflected in our instructional methods and materials. We view the language as a tool for special purposes rather than as a goal in itself. Our purpose is the foreign language for business. As a skill in addition to a thorough foundation in business studies, knowledge of a foreign language can provide the international business man with the competitive edge. To illustrate this with a real life example: an Atlanta business man who had competed in an international bidding had been notified that he was among the top contenders and that he should go to Germany

to be present for the opening of the bids. Upon his arrival he found himself in a large room filled with people with the German company representatives sitting at the big table in front. The envelopes were openend and something was said. Although he thought he recognized his name being called out, he didn't understand anything. The next thing he knew was that the Japanese sitting next to him got up saying something in German. As you might guess, he then found out that he had indeed won the bidding but failing to make himself known to the board the contract was then awarded to the Japanese firm. The man returned to Atlanta and immediately enrolled in a German course!! He had had to find out first hand how important it is to speak the language of the buyer; and that increasingly may be the French, or the German, or the Spanish speaking person. One good first step in that direction is speaking a foreign language, maybe not perfectly, but well enough to feel comfortable in a business setting. By the way, learning technical language may be easier than one generally thinks. The vocabulary is both relatively limited in scope and repetitive. As a business oriented person, one has previous knowledge of the subject matter and is additionally motivated by interest.

There are two Applied Language Programs at Georgia State: on the undergraduate level we offer a major or minor in commercial French, German and Spanish and on the post graduate level a program in Translation and Interpretation. Both programs train bi-lingual professionals and students who will later serve the international business community. Since you are mainly interested in business studies I will come back to the business language program later and now would just like to make some brief remarks with respect to the program in translation and interpretation.

In 1979, this program was instituted for the bilingual person who has a well rounded education , an interest and knowledge of current events and a general facility of mind. In five quarters we provide the technical training for the translator by incorporating the latest state of the art in teaching methods, such as use of the computer as a word processor and familiarizing our students with computer assisted translation software. In the Interpretation program, special emphasis is given to Court Interpreting in Spanish. Through surveys we try to stay current with the market situation with respect to languages or subject matters most frequently required. Our staff includes experts from outside as well as visiting professors from other institutions. Designed to give our students or faculty members the option of experience abroad, we are currently instituting an exchange program with an European institution. After having been graduated from our program, the students have the opportunity to take the American Translators Association's accreditation examination on campus. So far, more than 95% have passed; a record we are very proud of.

Professional exams are a good guideline when it comes to determining course contents and skills. For our business language programs, we can use the certificate examinations issued by the Chambers of Commerce of Paris and Madrid and the Diploma of Business German, since Georgia State University serves as a testing center for these examinations, which are given once a year. Successful performance on these examinations is an indication that the student can operate in a business setting in a foreign environment. The student receives a certificate which is an excellent asset to the internationally oriented student, since the issuing organizations have high credibility in their respective countries.

In the commercial language program, the two upper level courses in French,

German and Spanish are numbered 307 and 407 and we recommend at least one additional course such as "France today", dealing with current issues on the political, economic and cultural scene. After completing satisfactorily this level of study, the students both have a good command of the language and are able to communicate well. Our course contents reflect what the business community expects our students, the coming generation of international businessmen, to know. Aside from introducing the appropriate business vocabulary, our topics include the legal structure of business, the banking system, employer-employee relations, general business practices, cultural and social issues and business correspondence. We stress the contrastive approach to sensitize our students to the all important differences. With respect to teaching materials we stress the use of authentic material, such as unedited articles from newspapers and professional magazines, or publications from agencies which deal with such topics as locating your business in Bavaria, or forms you fill out at a bank or the post office.

Teaching for special purposes in the context of the business setting also means teaching special skills. We therefore include materials which develop listening skills - radio broadcasts would be an example - or practice discussions and interviews in class. Audio visual materials, such as news reels, have also been effective.

Academically speaking, then, we prepare our students with the appropriate vocabulary, the technical knowledge and the cultural information as well as the skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking which they need to be effective in the international business setting. What we haven't given them yet and what we really can't give them at Georgia State, is the practical

experience. However, we have found a way to open the door to real life application of their skills through internships. Among the number of firms with international connections in Atlanta which have taken our students as interns and provide settings in which they can work and practice their language are Hartsfield Airport, international travel agencies, and the Goethe Institute. We also offer the opportunity for our students to work abroad in paid internships. In 1984 we were selected to join a consortium headed by Eastern Michigan University which has over twelve years experience with their program in "Foreign Languages and International Trade." This area studies program combines business and foreign languages and has built a successful network of internship positions in cooperation with universities in France, Germany, Japan and Spain. Unfortunately, our own Japanese program is not yet developed to the point where we can utilize the Japan option. We are able to send qualified students, who are sponsored by Eastern Michigan, to work in responsible positions in firms such as Ford, Phillips or Mercedes Benz in France, Germany and Spain. The internships last from three months to a year, and, if desired, business courses can be taken later at their respective universities.

Part of the qualifications for admission to the internship abroad is the successful passing of the commercial language courses, specific basic business courses plus a minor concentration in one area such as accounting or marketing. The experience abroad is one of the most valuable preparations for students for their later careers. There, they are exposed not only to the foreign language in their work experience, but also to technical terminology of their selected field. After completing this regimen, they are prepared to either go out into the job market or seek entrance into an international MBA program, many of

which now incorporate foreign language skills.

This course of study has been designed especially for foreign language students who are interested in business and want to combine business courses with their foreign language skills. It is of course equally advantageous for the business student who wants to enter the international field.

The addition of an advisory board has been the latest step in the development of the Applied Language Programs. At present, nine leaders in the community involved in international businesses or agencies have been selected to represent a cross-section of languages as well as industries, including manufacturing, service industries and transportation. The purpose of the board is to advise us on the relevance of course contents and skills taught, to provide internships for our students as well as for those who come from abroad under the auspices of our program, and to give us increased visibility in the community. In return we display the names of the companies on our brochures, provide them ocassionally with translators or guides to accompany foreign visitors, and of course give the companies the opportunity to contribute to the further development of international education and business.

By preparing our students with the technical knowledge, the language skills and the international perspective and experience which will make them the successful business persons of tomorrow I feel interdisciplinary programs such as ours at Georgia State University offer the key to a rewarding future.